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ИСЛАМ В ПОЛИТИКЕ: ИДЕОЛОГИЯ ИЛИ ПРАГМАТИЗМ?

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ISLAM IN POLITICS: IDEOLOGY OR PRAGMATISM?

Valdai Discussion Club
Analytical Report

RIANOVOSTI

**Institute of Oriental Studies,
Russian Academy of Sciences**

Council on Foreign and Defense Policy

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This report is based on speeches and discussions of the International Valdai Club's Middle East Dialogue conference, held in Marrakesh, Morocco, on May 14–15, 2013. The event was attended by high-profile politicians from the Middle East and North Africa, including leaders of Islamist movements, as well as prominent experts, analysts and journalists from Russia and around the world.

Authors:

Professor **Vitaly Naumkin**, Director, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; Corresponding Member, RAS

Ambassador **Alexander Aksenenok**, Ph.D. in Law

Boris Dolgov, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; Ph.D. in History

Professor **Irina Zvyagelskaya**, Chief Research Fellow, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; D.Sc. in History

Vasily Kuznetsov, Research Fellow, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; Director , Centre for Transformation of Political Systems and Political Cultures, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Ph.D. in History

Ambassador **Veniamin Popov**, Director, Civizations` Partnership Centre, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University), MFA of Russia

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1. Introduction

The turbulent events of the Arab Awakening in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011–2012 have unleashed significant socio-political transformations in the region, ranging from the downfall of decades-old autocratic regimes and the rise of new political elites, to bloody, protracted conflicts involving ethno-religious and political forces. While the Arab Awaken-

> The situation in the Middle East is extremely chaotic and volatile. It is only natural therefore that politicians and experts hold divergent views on the causes of these sweeping changes in the region, as well as on the current state and future prospects of the countries involved

ing has affected different countries in different ways, they all have one feature in common – the emergence of predominately Sunni Islamist parties and movements in the political arena, who have since taken power in Tunisia and Egypt.

The situation in the region is still extremely chaotic and volatile. It is only natural therefore that politicians and experts hold divergent views on the causes of these sweeping changes in the region, as well as on the current state and future prospects of the countries involved. Many believe that the transformation of the Arab world will be a painful process that could last for years if not decades. Others think that the peak has already passed or will pass in a year or so, and that the process has entered a new, less turbulent and radical phase.

There are also differing opinions on the role and place of Islamists in these countries that have been rocked by revolution, rebellion and the overthrow of old regimes. Some analysts believe that Islam will remain an integral part of the process for the foreseeable future. In other

words, the Islamists are committed to remaining in power for the long term, and no other force will be capable of mounting a serious challenge in the near future. The population has clearly expressed its confidence in the Islamists, and this trust will not be exhausted quickly. Others think that the Islamists' days in power are numbered – that they are incapable of solving the intractable, primarily socioeconomic problems facing their countries and cannot possibly live up to the great hopes invested in them by the mass protest movements that swept them to power.

It is common knowledge that young people have been the main force behind the protest movements, particularly in Tunisia and Egypt. They demanded the departure of the former leaders and the elites that formed their support base from politics; greater public participation in political life; respect for human dignity, human rights and justice; an end to corruption; eradication of unemployment and social inequality; and better living standards.

Islamists joined the protest movements only in the final stages. Some Arab politicians even believe that Islamists stole the victory from the insurgent youth //*Former Egyptian Foreign Minister and former Secretary of the Arab League Amr Moussa has expressed this view in speeches. Prominent Indian analyst and participant in the Middle East Dialogue, Kumaraswamy Polur Raman, believes that the Islamists' contribution to the overthrow of dictators was minimal and may be disputed altogether, though their electoral victory cannot be denied//*. Still others hold that the Islamists engineered the revolutions by exploiting the discontent of the youth and using mosques, not the Internet, to mobilize the people //*Michael Scheuer, a prominent American analyst and former high-ranking CIA official has said in numerous interviews that highly educated, pro-Western young people constitute an insignificant part of the Egyptian population and, as such, could not play a major role in shaping the future of their country//*.

2. Political Islam in Countries of the Arab Awakening: Between Society and the State

Islamism and Secularism: Enemies, Rivals or the Two Faces of Janus?

Some analysts see the Arab Awakening as a great Islamist revolution rivaling the 1979 revolution in Iran in terms of the social shock, although, of course, the Iranian revolution was limited to one county. Others argue that it is wrong to claim that secular regimes were replaced by Islamic ones. First of all, not all

> Some analysts see the Arab Awakening as a great Islamist revolution, others argue it

of the former regimes were entirely secular. Moreover, the extent of Islamization of the new regimes is still not clear, nor is the outcome of the confrontation between the Islamists and the loose coalition of secular nationalist, left-wing and liberal forces that oppose them, all the more so considering the fierce rivalry between different groups and factions within each side.

As for the doubts concerning the nature of the old regimes, they were secular in the sense that the actions of the governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya were not determined by religious dogma. Political decision-making was not viewed through the prism of sacred texts, and power was legitimized mostly on secular grounds. At the same time, religious institutions were not fully separate from the state, and the educational systems and political discourse in these countries contained religious elements. And the leaders of these regimes tried to position themselves within the religious community by making various symbolic gestures and publicly demonstrating their commitment to the faith. Some introduced a number of Sharia precepts into law (Libya and Egypt), while others sought to establish pro-government religious parties (Tunisia). In Morocco, the king remains the country's religious leader with the title of Caliph, or Commander of the Faithful.

Some experts believe this understanding of religion is intrinsic in Arab culture, which

means that the emergence of European-style secular political systems is unrealistic in principle, regardless of the Arab Awakening or anything else. The division into the religious and the secular in Islam is relative and exists as it were within the religion itself. The validity of this seeming paradox is confirmed by the Sunni maxim: Islam is both the religion and the state (ad-din wa-d-daula). Moreover, even Christians in the Middle East often demonstrate a similar attitude to the issue. It is not unusual to hear them say they are Christian by religion but Muslim by nationality. All of this, however, does not prevent the Islamists from

The religious, historical and cultural identity of both society and the state has moved to the top of the political agenda in the countries of the Arab Awakening

regarding secularism (in the classical understanding of the term) as the main enemy of Muslim identity.

In accordance with the above point of view, both the pre-revolutionary political regimes and the Islamic parties and political organizations that have replaced them are not necessarily religious parties. Quite often they are referred to as "secular Islamist parties" that advocate the formation of an "Islamic-oriented civil state" and are actively developing this concept.

If we go by this logic, no analysis of political processes in the Arab world, which proceeds

from the assumption that Islam and secularism are in opposition, can fully reflect the reality. For many politicians this opposition is irrelevant. For example, Hamdeen Sabbahi, one of the leading candidates in Egypt's presidential race in 2012, did not speak about religion during his campaign, focusing instead on democratization. In his opinion, both political Islam that rejects secular forces and secular parties that deny Islamist organizations' right to exist are enemies of democracy, advocates of dictatorship and traitors to the revolution.

At the same time, many secular forces and a number of Islamist groups are demonstrating a mixed attitude to religious matters and are far from wishing that their opponents be ousted from the political arena. While attacking political Islam, secular parties almost never talk about separating religious institutions from the state or eliminating elements of religious indoctrination in the educational system. In some cases, mainly in Egypt, they prefer to call themselves civil rather than secular, and sometimes evenform coalitions with moderate Islamists. As a rule, the moderates do not reject either the concept of universal human rights or the principles of democratic rule. Sometimes they even appear ready to acknowledge the secular character of the state.

They build their political strategy on rational arguments, invoking Islam as a rhetorical device. Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) is a good example in that it has recognized the secular foundation of

the Turkish political system despite the party's Islamic orientation. However, opponents of Prime Minister Erdoğan's party accuse it of promoting a "creeping Islamization." An indicative development in this context is the recent heated controversy over the law limiting alcohol sales and ads passed by Turkish parliament. Opponents of the JDP regarded this as an assault on human rights and freedoms //*Interview with Ihsan Ozkes, deputy of the Republican People's Party from Istanbul, published in the newspaper Yenisafak on May 30, 2013. http://yenisafak.mobi/politika-haber/eski-muftuden-alkol-duzenlemesine-elest-30.05.2013-528211//*.

All of this shows that the rigid antinomy of secularism and Islamism does not fully reflect the reality of the Middle East. And yet

The religious, historical and cultural identity of both society and the state has moved to the top of the political agenda in the countries of the Arab Awakening

this antinomy not only exists but seems to dominate the information space. The reason is likely rooted in the obvious fact that the religious, historical and cultural identity of both society and the state has moved to the top of the political agenda in the countries of the Arab Awakening, with the usual three projects in competition for the future – pan-Arab (currently marginal), liberal (pro-Western and relatively secular), and Arab Muslim represented by Islamic parties. These three projects tend to

result in polarization, pitting the Islamist pole against the left-liberal pole, while smoothing over the contradictions between the liberal ideology as such and left-wing (usually pan-Arab) ideologies.

Thus, a clear contradiction is emerging. While at the level of practical politics and programs, both left-liberal and Islamist forces are prone to accept some synthesis of the principles of modern statehood and traditional Islamic values (albeit in different proportions), they never tire of accusing each other of double dealing at the level of political discourse.

Secular forces are accused of abandoning ancient Muslim values and traditions, while the Islamists are accused of seeking to create an Islamic state and rejecting universal rights and freedoms. In fact, it is these recriminations that form the basis for structuring the political space and determine the party identities in the eyes of the electorate.

The advocates of secularism in Arab countries claim that the Islamists are trying to establish theocratic rule and monopolize power and that they are incapable of effective governance and do not respect universally recognized human rights. They cite Iran or Saudi Arabia and interpret the current stage of the Arab awakening as the export of the Islamic revolution or the result of intrigues by Gulf monarchies with the tacit approval of the West. The secularists fear that the Islamists are moving their countries backward to an archaic past, and that the result will be dictatorship and economic collapse.

In turn, Islamists claim that their model for the political system is based on the positive foundation of traditional religious values, while the ideology of strictly secular parties is essentially anti-Islamic and negative, and their plans for the future are vague and rely on values borrowed from Western democracies.

Secular parties accuse Islamists of exploiting religion to seize power. They see the Islamists as reckless and unfit to govern. The Islamists defend themselves by pointing to the experience of Hezbollah, which has a long track record of success in the social and administrative spheres as well as regional politics. Or there is the example of the Hamas govern-

> Secular parties accuse Islamists of exploiting religion to seize power and being unfit to govern. The Islamists defend themselves by pointing to the long track record of success in the social and administrative spheres as well as regional politics

ment in Gaza, which is maintaining stability and continues to enjoy popular support even in extreme conditions. They also recall that secular nationalists had their chance to carry out their project but they failed – their liberal policies and attempts to separate religion and state were not only negatively received by Arab societies but turned their countries into backward, failed states, giving rise to the Arab

Awakening (the fate of Saddam Hussein's regime also comes to mind here).

Islamists: Builders or Gravediggers of Democracy?

Although the most engaged segment of society and the majority of political parties in Arab countries profess their commitment to democracy and their belief that to slide back to autocracy would be unacceptable, it is precisely the issue of democratization that is becoming a stumbling block in relations between different political forces in the region. How democratic were the elections that brought Islamist governments to power in the region? Are they consistent advocates of democracy, or do they secretly dream of monopolizing power and creating a new authoritarianism?

What in general is the meaning of democracy in the Middle East? As is clear, public consensus is elusive on these issues.

The Islamists emphasize that the legitimacy of their governments is already proven by their victory in free elections, during which voters expressed their belief that political Islam is the force that will hopefully bring democracy, pluralism and freedom to society.

Their opponents counter this claim with two arguments. First, the electoral victory was narrow and does not indicate mass popular support, considering the modest levels of voter turnout. Moreover, people in these countries

are not used to freely expressing their will and are guided at times by a simple desire to protest. This means that the Islamist parties do not have sufficient legitimacy to build new political architecture as they see fit. The second argument is that, having no experience of democracy or a real understanding of the essence of political debate, a parliamentary

Islamists must become agents of change, create new democratic institutions of government and procedures for governing

system or civil rights and liberties, Arab society is not ready to make an informed choice.

The opponents of the Islamists portray their victory as the result of applying political technologies, and describe them as defenders of their narrow party interests over national interests. They charge that the Islamists have stolen the fruits of the revolution and are trying to impose new authoritarianism.

The Islamists' opponents in Egypt cite as evidence the greater emphasis on Islam in the new constitution, the de facto conversion of the Muslim Brotherhood's Shura Council into a legislative body, and President Muhamed Morsi's attempts to expand his presidential powers against the will of the country and in ways that serve his party's interests rather than national interests. Similar moves have been made in Tunisia as well. In the summer of 2012, Islamists tried to make Sharia the foundation for legislation but had to retreat in the face of

resistance from civil society. The Shura Council of the Islamist Ennahda party, essentially independently, appointed Ali Laarayedh as prime minister – a man who, as interior minister, gave the green light to numerous Salafi militias.

The Islamists' supporters believe it would be a mistake to treat all these accusations as entirely valid. The Egyptian constitution was adopted by referendum with almost two thirds of the vote. Even if today many disagree with its provisions, millions of people supported it at the time. Moreover, for the most part, the amendments to it had already existed in Egyptian law but as individual statutes rather than constitutional provisions. Finally, the constitution does not contradict the positions of the country's main political forces on key issues, such as civil rights and freedoms, the status of religious minorities and women's rights. In Tunisia, Ennahda rejected the first drafts of the Fundamental Law and continued to coordinate it with the opposition.

When the decision-making bodies of the ruling Islamist parties perform legislative functions, they do so strictly within the legitimate framework. All laws are adopted by parliamentary structures and it is not the fault of Islamists that they have more seats and their deputies observe party discipline better than others.

Finally, Egyptian President Morsi or Tunisian Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh are both acting in line with mandates from the people, and there is as yet no evidence that they are promoting narrow party interests to the

detriment of national interests. After all, Morsi acted as an Egyptian rather than an Islamist during the crisis in the Gaza Strip in the fall of 2012, and Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh has shown himself willing to rebuke radical Salafi groups.

Publicly Islamists altogether deny that there is a contradiction between their party interests

Islamists are drawing a line between democracy as a principle of exercising power (which they accept) and democracy as a set institutions and procedures borrowed from the West (which they reject)

and national interests. For example, the Egyptian Salafi party An-Nour, like the Tunisian Ennahda, has publicly rejected dictatorship, and expressed its support for universally recognized human rights and its readiness to work with all parties interested in constructive cooperation. Its party ideologists maintain that freedom in general and freedom of choice in particular are inherent in Islam, and for this reason Islamists are natural advocates of democracy.

At the same time, one cannot but acknowledge what many analysts identify as the Islamists' subjective approach to implementing their political program. Possibly the problem is not so much them as the disparity between their public support and the challenges they face. Having won a relative and largely opportunistic victory, they must now become agents of change. They must create new democratic

institutions of government and procedures for governing. This obviously requires consensus among all political forces and segments of society.

If a democratically elected government takes a subjective approach to nation building, unleashing widespread discontent, while at the same time failing to create channels for legitimate protest and influencing the government, can it be still characterized as committed to democracy? Wouldn't the street protests that ousted the former regimes be the only alternative in this case? Who can guarantee that the Arab Spring scenario won't be repeated over and over again? Are Islamists capable of yielding power if they lose elections?

Standards are one of the most important aspects of democracy. Representatives of Islamist political organizations describe the political process in the Arab Awakening countries, where they won the elections, as democratic by virtue of this circumstance and also because the new governments are performing their functions within the framework of laws and political competition. Their opponents emphasize that democracy is a process that includes the building of institutions, such as an independent judiciary, and the promotion of independent media as well as free and equal operation of political parties and NGOs. The ballot box is just the point of departure for this process. As the Iraqi experience shows, it is during the post-election stage that a democratic transition becomes most vulnerable.

In a situation where the majority of society seeks democracy without fully grasping its meaning and the ruling forces' interpretation of democracy and their sincerity remain questionable, there are understandable apprehensions about whether these countries will smoothly pass through this stage.

It is impossible to consolidate state institutions and make government administration more effective without public consensus and trust in political elites. Consensus and trust are hardly possible because of the crisis plaguing the already weak national identities

As we can see, the Islamists themselves share these apprehensions over the smooth progress of nation building along democratic lines. Recognizing that their rich Islamic heritage must be used in political practice, some of them suggest substituting this heritage for certain elements of the Western political system with a view to making it more authentic and natural for Arab society. In this way, the Islamists are drawing a line between democracy as a principle of exercising power (which they accept) and democracy as a set institutions and procedures borrowed from the West (which they reject) //*One of the participants in the dialogue said this: "We, Islamists, distinguish between democracy as a principle and democracy as practice." In his view, this ambivalence opens up many opportunities, but is also fraught with danger*//. This ambivalence between tradition and modernity and between authenticity and universality opens up the prospect of building a harmonious system, while also portending a possible return to dictatorship. Islamists believe that the only safeguard against this threat is their ability to make the right moral choice based on the tenets of Islam.

Needless to say, much will depend on whether Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia are willing to foster civil society and grant it some socio-political functions. In a sense, this will also decide how successful the planned and ongoing reforms will be, regardless of whether the state they produce is called democratic, Islamic, or democratic with an Islamic face.

Is Public Consensus Possible?

The heated debates in the Arab Awakening countries on the future of democracy with an Islamic face remain purely theoretical for the time being. It is impossible to build a democracy in a short span of time, especially when relying on endemic cultural and religious traditions. At the same time, the turbulence that has spread throughout the Middle East presents these new rulers with the concrete challenges of consolidating (or restoring) state institutions and making government administration more effective.

It is impossible to meet these challenges without a minimum level of public consensus and trust in political elites. Consensus and trust, in turn, are hardly possible because of the crisis plaguing the already weak national identities in these

countries. This crisis manifests itself in a dispute between secularists and Islamists that is similar to the confrontation between Westernizers and Slavophiles in Russia in the 19th century.

In the 20th century, before the Islamists came to power, Arab countries went through two stages. Initially, national unity, stability and

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development were ensured by monarchies. Only in a few cases was absolutism a vehicle of modernization and progress. More often, it simply sought to perpetuate the traditional power relations and an archaic social organization, eventually triggering a series of revolutions in a number of Arab countries in the 1950s.

In the second stage, a politically active military became the main driver of reform. Consisting mostly of secular nationalists, the military was able to maintain national unity for some time, but, with the exception of Egypt, these regimes proved unable to ensure national consolidation and effective governance. As events in Libya, Yemen and Syria demonstrated, the militaries of the region were prone to internal fragmentation, resulting in a complicated and unstable system of checks and balances between rival groups. The essential difference

between Arab military regimes and the Turkish army was the latter's ability to ensure for a long time (but not forever) both the existence of a system of government and the development of its institutions.

Neither monarchies, nor military regimes were interested in developing a civil identity. In the former case, national identity was reduced to recognition of the sovereign (in the form of an oath of allegiance to the monarch, or bay'a, which remains the symbol of loyalty in a number of states). The absence of fealty in military regimes was compensated for by harsh military authoritarianism. Both have ceased to exist, and if the new leaders want to transition to democracy, they must create and foster a responsible civil society.

In search of public support, the Islamists, who have their own view of history, must simultaneously imitate the West and draw inspiration from the times of the Prophet Muhammad and the Pious Caliphs. However, while in that remote past, public consensus meant points of contact between believers with different views on some religious and political problems, today it is primarily expressed in the ability of the government to accommodate secular Muslims, religious minorities, atheists and women. Otherwise ideologically motivated Islamists may prove more dangerous than the former military rulers in the Arab world, who had to fight for survival rather than actually govern for many years. If they fail, the Islamists will

either have to give up power or will plunge the region into internecine strife and chaos.

In light of this, some feel that Arab societies should abandon the Islamic project in favor of a secular one. But recent history has shown that today secularists are equally determined to represent society as a whole. They think consensus can only be achieved by drawing a divide between religion and politics. However, on this road they will face the same problem as their opponents (if in a mirror image): after all, for many years advocates of political Islam have been the most active and resilient part of civil society, and the fusion of religion and politics is the cornerstone of their political self-identification.

> The survival of society and the state in the countries of the Arab Awakening depends on the ability of the governing forces to halt the erosion of government institutions, ensure social and national security, and meet the moral and ethical requirements of the people

Another problem is that secular forces have demonstrated their weakness in the post-revolutionary period and now have to focus on attracting voters and preparing for the next election instead of analyzing the fundamental issues affecting society and national development. The victorious Islamists are preoccupied with the same concerns. In the past two years, they have lost some of their competitive advantage and must now operate in a competitive environment, for the first time in their history. Perhaps it's true that in the post-revolutionary period all fundamental problems and disputes have been subordinated to the short-term considerations of political groups fighting for power.

Given the fact that the internal Arab crisis is being aggravated by external players (primarily the West), whose state institutions are also being discredited and whose public structures are subject to an erosion, many experts believe the focus should be on finding mechanisms to ensure the survival of public structures and state institutions rather than on seeking civic identities and public consensus (which is impossible for the time being). In this context, it is important to consider two points. First, these mechanisms should not apply to individual countries. They must be universally applicable in the entire region, including states that have not yet joined the Arab Awakening, because close interaction between countries of the region, open borders and the free flow of information can easily spread instability and conflict. Second, these mechanisms cannot be based on a political system with a single dominant party (which is currently being imposed on some Arab countries by their Western partners). Otherwise we may see the restoration of the pre-revolutionary situation and, in the worst-case scenario, long-term, sustained development will become impossible.

Can Islamists Govern Effectively?

The very survival of society and the state in the countries of the Arab Awakening depends on the ability of the governing forces to halt the erosion of government institutions, ensure social and national security, and meet the moral and ethical requirements of the people. Critics of the new Islamist governments in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen claim that they are unable to meet any of these challenges. One Arab participant in the Valdai conference on the Middle East said that Islamists everywhere were trampling on the idea of a secular state and wanted to monopolize power, and that Western support for the Islamists

The key challenges are to build a system free of the old vices and to combine political democracy with social democracy, or the responsibility of the state and elites for the state of society and to society

was a mistake. She added that secular forces should assume responsibility for the future of their countries, while recognizing that this would be difficult after their betrayal by the West. This criticism speaks to how heated the debate over the future of the Arab Awakening countries is.

But there are quite a few people in the secular opposition who are optimistic that a considerable number of Islamists will undergo a political and ideological evolution, compelled by their position at the top of the political system

to be pragmatic and seek cooperation with other forces in society.

However, as they expand their influence to all aspects of life, the Islamists become susceptible to the same vices that led to the collapse of their predecessors – nepotism, political patronage and clan systems. For example, Rafik Abdessalem, son-in-law of the leader of the Ennahda party, was made foreign minister in the first government of the three-party ruling coalition in Tunisia. People with personal ties to these new governments have also received prominent positions in the media, state corporations and the judiciary. Corruption has only increased following the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Well-known Tunisian human rights activist Mokhtar Yahyaoui has said, "A corrupt regime was replaced with a corrupt society."

However, during the 2011 uprisings, civil society was not taking action against individual leaders so much as the vicious ruling systems they had come to symbolize. Now the key challenges are to build a system free of the old vices and to combine political democracy (institutional and procedural), which is making notable progress, with social democracy, or the responsibility of the state and elites for the state of society and to society. Neither Iraq nor the Palestinian National Authority have successfully managed democratization, to cite the two examples that show how complicated this task is. In the case of Iraq, political democratization led to greater violence and lawlessness in both society and government. The Palestinians have fared

better, but the change of elites after Hamas came to power in the Gaza Strip still did not put an end to abuses. Hamas gained access to administrative resources in a political system that lacked political competition. As a result, Hamas, which won popular support on the basis of their perceived immunity to corruption (an issue they hammered Fatah on), could

The current authorities are facing much bigger security challenges than their predecessors, and with extremely limited resources

not completely avoid corruption. Having taken the reins of power, they failed to build competent administrative institutions and to resolve economic problems (although the blockade makes this extremely hard, if not altogether impossible).

The task of ensuring public safety is also difficult. During the Arab Awakening, security agencies were discredited in the eyes of the public, which has had a demoralizing effect on them. They have not shown sufficient loyalty to the new authorities. Threats to security increased many times over as a result of illegal arms trafficking, the dramatic weakening of border protection, and the consolidation of terrorist infrastructure in consequence of events in Libya and Syria. Actually, the current authorities are facing much bigger security challenges than their predecessors, and with extremely limited resources.

Meanwhile, critics of the Islamists believe that under certain circumstances, for example, if Islamists take control of the military and security services, they may be able to establish an authoritarian rule and monopolize power under the pretext of fighting extremism, while maintaining a formally democratic front (for instance, by imposing a state of emergency). In this case, the regimes would be able to compensate their failure to evolve effective government institutions with strong-arm pressure on society. This prospect inspires even greater fear in society, especially its most educated and modern strata.

The ineffective attempts by the current governments to resolve key developmental problems provide their opponents with an opportunity to talk about the need to establish non-partisan technocratic governments. However, the degree of social and political polarization over fundamental, existential issues gives rise to doubts as to whether there are any politically neutral technocrats in existence. Lack of party affiliation does not guarantee lack of bias. As such, the appointment of technocrats to top positions in the government would only help overcome the current difficulties, if this process were based on objective factors rather than perceptions of the "evil intentions" of the Islamists.

Some hold that the moral purity of religious movements, rooted in the sincere beliefs of their members, could, in theory, guarantee gradual institutional and economic normalization, as well as resolve security issues. If the moderate forces in power today do not demonstrate such

purity, perhaps it will be demonstrated by their more radical brethren, who do not suffer from the cynical pragmatism typical of the moderates.

Calls are being heard to use Iranian and Saudi experience. In the case of Iran, there is a fairly clear division between the moral and ethical sphere, dominated by Islamic norms and values, and the institutional sphere, which is largely based on democratic procedures.

In the Saudi case, there is a division between socio-political relations based on traditional principles and the economy patterned on the Western model (it's telling that Saudi Arabia lags far behind even some Western states in the sphere of Islamic banking). In both cases, Islamic morality and traditional values mediate social relations and ensure their stability, while also providing moral guideposts for the government's economic and social policies.

However, even if radical Islamists prove themselves more effective leaders than the moderates, the threats that Arab societies will encounter on the road to national renewal will be no less serious that the current ones. The main threat comes from the more ideologically consistent Islamists who are clearly trying to impose their own vision of authentic Islamic morality and ethics on society and legislation. Obviously, such Islamization of public life will be met with resistance from important social groups, primarily religious minorities. This puts the issue of intra- and inter-religious relations at the top of the agenda in the Middle East.

The main threat comes from the more ideologically consistent Islamists who are clearly trying to impose their own vision of authentic Islamic morality and ethics on society and legislation

3. Intertwinements of Confessionalian Contradictions

Relations between and within religious communities in the Middle East are evolving on three main levels: between Muslims and non-Muslims, between the Sunni majority and non-Sunni minorities, and between different currents within Sunni Islam. The problems and conflicts that exist on each of these three levels have different causes, dynamics, prospects, and relevance for individual countries in the region.

Non-Muslims in the Middle East: A Fading Reality?

Almost all Arab countries have native non-Muslim populations, mostly Christian, but also Jewish. In addition, there is a small following of new religious movements and an insignificant number of atheists. The latter have never been mentioned in any sociological studies and are practically unrecognized, which makes it almost impossible to estimate their numbers. These groups, especially Christians and Jews, face three principal threats.

First, the deteriorating security environment has exposed them to attacks by radical Salafis.

This threat is quite real in Egypt, which saw attacks on Copts in 2012, and Tunisia, where a synagogue in the nation's capital was attacked in the fall of 2012. This problem is likely to be resolved with improved law enforcement, which, of course, will depend on many factors, but none of them are related to inter-confessionalian issues.

The second and much more serious threat is that the new governments in the region will exploit sectarian tensions to deflect public anger onto minority groups. Opponents accuse them of a fundamental unwillingness to oppose violence against minorities.

According to the secular opposition, this is not only a product of Islamist ideology – which at its most radical treats Jews and Christians as infidels and calls on Muslims to wage jihad against them – but also the inherently totalitarian nature of the Islamist parties. Such parties need to designate an enemy, both external (Israel and the West) and internal (religious, sexual, and other minorities).

This, the opposition claims, is based on the natural affinity of all Islamist movements, their claim to a monopoly on sacred truth, and the fact that they have historically evolved as protest movements (always struggling against something and unable to offer a positive agenda).

In response, Islamists have emphasized their tolerance for minorities, periodically gotten tough with the Salafis (occasionally banning

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even some of their peaceful rallies), and established outwardly cordial relations with the leaders of minority religious groups. This, according to Islamists, shows that they are in fact the only agents of democracy in the region, no matter how vehemently they are being accused of totalitarian leanings.

However, these assurances have failed to convince the secular opposition, who see in these gestures only an attempt to save face before the West and consolidate their power. Neither does it seem to convince the Christians and the Jews, who have been fleeing the Arab Awakening countries in growing numbers.

The third threat to the rights of religious minorities is the gradual Islamization of all spheres of social and political life.

While the first two threats target the Christian and Jewish populations, the third one concerns society in general and is closely linked with the broader human rights issue in the Middle East. Responding to the opposition's accusations, the Islamist authorities point out that none of the official documents adopted or proposed by them, including constitutional declarations, draft constitutions, party programs, etc. contain anything prejudicial to minority interests.

Nevertheless, the problem, as we see it, is not a matter of law, but rather of social relations. However good the new laws are, the broad re-Islamization of society along Salafi lines (not accounting for the specific Islamic traditions of individual countries) will create an uncomfortable environment for minorities, forcing them to either leave or create enclaves of their own and become marginalized.

This threat is particularly significant in countries where Christians make up a substantial portion of the population and inter-confessionalian contradictions are dramatically intertwined with intra-confessionalian contradictions, mostly between the Sunni majority and Shiite minorities, such as Imamites, Zaydis, and also Alawites, and others.

The Sunni-Shia Schism: Who Is Threatening Whom?

There are Shiites and related groups among Muslim populations in many Arab countries (such as Alawites in Syria, Zaydis in Yemen, and the Imamites in Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and even Egypt, which is home to

> Another serious threat is that the new governments in the region will exploit sectarian tensions to deflect public anger onto minority groups

about 20,000 Shiite Imamites). Accordingly, Sunni-Shia relations are a problem in all of them. The extent, as well as the origin, of the problem depends on a number of factors, including foreign influence, historical circumstances, and matters of Islamic religious doctrine.

Almost all Arab countries were ruled by Shiites at some point in their history (the Idrisids in Morocco, the Fatimids in Tunisia, Egypt and the Syrian-Palestinian region, the Qarmatians on the Arabian Peninsula and in southern Iraq, and the Zaydi Imamate in North Yemen), and memories of these periods are still very much alive today.

Shia Islam evolved in the early centuries of Islam as an anti-government religious movement, whose adherents challenged the supreme authority of the Sunni caliphs.

Today, it still has considerable potential for protest.

Combined with what many see as Iran's positive example of a Shia state, these factors could prompt many in the Muslim world to opt for Shiite rather than Sunni Islamism, as opposed to a secular model.

This possibility, however unlikely it may seem, is already causing the Islamists (particularly the Salafis) to treat the Shiite minority as a "fifth column" in the Islamic world. This is largely due to the hostility to Iran and its grand political ambitions in the region and the Muslim world in general. The Egyptian government, fearing Shiite propaganda, even banned Iranian tourists from visiting the country in 2013.

Relations between and within religious communities are most dramatic in situations where confessionalism shapes power relations and a political system. This has been the case in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, and, to a certain extent, Saudi Arabia, whose eastern region has close to two million Shiites living under constant pressure from the conservative Sunni authorities.

Bahrain stands out in this list by virtue of the national dialogue its government launched in July 2011. This initiative, which brought together representatives of 300 civil and political organizations, has proved largely successful *//This does not exclude the possibility of renewed tensions in the future. Critics of the*

initiative have accused the government of dealing with confessionalian contradictions instead of addressing fundamental issues of human rights and political freedoms//, allowing the Sunni authorities to embark on a path to reconciliation with the country's disgruntled population, mostly Shiite.

Bahrain's successful experience has a lot to do with the fairly strong position of the ruling regime, which enjoys security guarantees from the member-states of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG) and sufficient resources to tackle existing problems. Moreover, the problems Bahrain faced were relatively simple. Despite the dangerous combination of extreme social and political

The Sunni-Shia problem depends on foreign influence, historical circumstances, and matters of Islamic religious doctrine

stratification and sectarian division in Bahrain, the authorities of this small nation had to address the grievances of only two main groups that are not geographically localized and that generally accept the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty.

In other countries the situation is more perilous. Lebanon and Iraq have lived (and are still living) through the horrors of inter-confessional confrontation. The violence that engulfed Iraq following the overthrow of

Saddam Hussein has reduced the Christian population from 1,500,000 to 400,000 people and aggravated antagonism between Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites.

This has led to increased geographic seclusion of the three groups and rising separatist sentiments. It should be mentioned that radical Islam has not taken root among the Kurds, whose ethno-national agenda remains the priority.

The civil war in Lebanon took the country to the brink of disintegration and resulted in the ethnic sorting of Christian, Shiite, Sunni, and Druze communities, which previously had been dispersed fairly evenly throughout the country. Both countries have so far avoided disintegration due to policies of outside players, relatively pragmatic government behavior, the general war weariness of the population, and the continued interdependence of the communities. All of these factors have made it possible to achieve a certain confessionalian balance.

But the threat of disintegration remains very real, given the possibility that the Syrian conflict could spread to these countries or that the influx Syrian refuges could upset the balance.

In countries like Tunisia and Egypt, where sectarian tensions are less pronounced, the fate of religious minorities will largely depend on developments within the Sunni community itself, particularly between various factions of the ruling Islamist parties.

The Competing Factions of Sunni Political Islam

The coming to power of political Islam has naturally heightened internal divisions. The main criteria for distinguishing various Islamist factions are their attitude toward democracy and liberal values (including minority rights), attitudes to doctrinal theology in the exercise of political power, and the extent of pragmatism in policy-making.

Relations between and within religious communities are most dramatic in situations where confessionalism shapes power relations and a political system like in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain

Based on these criteria, three groups within political Islam – moderate Islamists, Salafis, and jihadists – are usually identified. The first group accepts democratic norms and procedures, does not reject liberal values, recognizes the role of rational arguments in political debate, and is generally pragmatic.

Salafis, while accepting the democratic process, insist on value pluralism on the global scale and advocate a specifically Islamic value system. They play by democratic rules, but still support the idea of an Islamic state. Finally, the jihadists reject any political system rooted in liberal democracy.

While this classification is more or less universally accepted, some experts propose an alternative scheme based, not on current political behavior but rather on the goals pursued by various groups. They are distinguished by their attitude toward society, government institutions, political opponents, and religious minorities.

1. Liberal Islamists. This group is prepared to accept a democratic political system, while upholding an Islamic identity. If this approach prevails, Islamic political parties will merely occupy a niche in the overall party system. Provided there is consensus in society on historical, cultural and religious identity, these parties will be similar to European conservative parties that advocate traditional values.

Liberal Islamists are a purely national political force. They see Muslim unity, at best, as regionalism, and the caliphate as a potential integration structure in the Middle East. The group's nationalism is reflected in their respect for existing government institutions, which they seek to reform and ultimately modernize, bringing them in line with democratic standards (which is supposed to eventually sideline the army and special services in the government).

This group see secularism and secular parties as opponents but not enemies (as opposed to morally unacceptable atheism). Finally, they are quite open with regard to ethnic and religious minorities, and are even prepared to enroll their representatives in their ranks.

2. Proponents of a long game. Advocates of Islamic statehood and the unity of the Islamic ummah, they realize that achieving these goals in the short term is not feasible. Since assuming power in 2011, they have encountered a number of complicated social and economic problems, which they have been unable to resolve. They have responded by turning to the intellectual legacy of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, who argued that Islamization of the state first of all required the Islamization of society.

Recognizing both the impossibility of solving the existing economic problems and their lim-

The coming to power of political Islam has naturally heightened internal divisions

ited public support (as demonstrated by recent protests in Egypt and Tunisia in November and February respectively), they seek to use their current time in office to secure positions in key public spheres – primarily religion, education and the media – through which they can transform society. Meanwhile, they continue their efforts to discredit anti-Islamist political forces.

If they succeed, the political landscape in the region will be completely reshaped according to Islamic principles, leading to the emergence of "Islamic democracy," a kind of Sunni version of the Iranian political model. The democratic process and modernization would proceed, but within a larger Islamic logical

and semantic paradigm that rejects secularism. However, proponents of the long game do not seek to destroy or forcefully displace secularism, but rather to make it intrinsically unacceptable to society.

For now, Islamists focusing on the long game are ready to downplay religion in their rhetoric and to be guided by national interests, even temporarily foregoing the idea of Muslim unity (but keeping it for the future).

Objectively their main opponents are not even the secular parties (with which they are forced to cooperate with today to secure public support), but the Salafis and jihadists, with whom they share approximately the same values. The latter may be tempted to resort to violence to retain power, which could alienate the public from political Islam.

For this faction, tackling real social and economic problems is not currently of much importance. They mostly continue the policies of previous governments, while adding some populist issues like fighting corruption and overcoming the legacy of the old regime. Once in opposition, they will use leftist populism to increase their popularity with the public.

3. Proponents of a blitzkrieg. Like the previous group, they are upholding Islamic statehood and the unity of the ummah. However, they do not believe a long-term strategy for the Islamization of society is the most effective route. Their fears are understandable, as there is no guarantee that the appointments made by current authorities will not be reversed in

Salafi Parties of Egypt

Al-Asala, founded in 2011	**Al-Watan,** founded in 2013
Leader	
Adel Abdel Maqsoud Afifi	Emad Abdel Ghafour
Sharia/legal	
Calls for Islamic law	Supports Shariah as the general law
Women	
Grants political and social rights to women	Seeks to improve awareness of women's rights. Supports women joining the party and playing a role
Copts	
Opposes Copts running for the presidency	Supports law guaranteeing freedom of religion. Supports Copts joining the party
Economic	
Seeks to reposition Egypt as a major regional player in trade and international economic agreements	Supports increased investment in agriculture and scientific research to improve agriculture. Seeks to develop foreign trade by increasing exports
Foreign policy	
Seeks to strengthen relations with Nile Basin countries. Rejects the Camp David accords entirely	Seeks to strengthen relations with all Arab countries
Constitution	
Wants to replace "principles of Islamic Shariah" with "rulings of Shariah" (article 2). Wants to replace "Sovereignty belongs to the people…" with "Sovereignty is for God alone (article 5)	Opposes Article 2, because the word "principles" limits the scope of Shariah

Al-Nour, founded in 2011

Al-Raya, founded in 2013

👤 Leader

Younes Makhioun

Hazem Salah Abu Ismai

⚖️ Sharia/legal

Calls for Islamic law

Supports Shariah in legislation and in practice

🔒 Women

Advocates encouraging women to remain within their traditional roles in society and discourages them from pursuing careers and positions of leadership

Official platform does not address the topic of women

👤 Copts

Supports freedom of religion for Copts and allowing them their own personal status laws

Seeks to promote justice between all individuals of society of different religions and classes

📊 Economic

Supports economic equality and the redistribution of wealth. Opposes privatizing natural resources. Supports the expansion of Islamic banks. Denounces foreign aid and loans

Seeks to harness Egypt's already existing investment potential and allocate resulting funds in a socially equitable way

🌐 Foreign policy

Respects existing treaties and conventions. Calls for improving Egypt's regional and international role

Against the influence of Western powers, particularly Israel and the United States

📖 Constitution

Supports Article 2, which states that Islam is the religion of the state and that Islamic law is the main source of legislation

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Source: Middle East Institute

the future, meaning they would be unable to continue Islamizing society once in opposition.

Therefore, their main objective is to maintain the status quo as long as possible and to stay in power after the transitional period. Apart from engaging in propaganda and attempting to discredit opponents, their most important task is to gain control of the levers of power which, for a long time, underpinned the stability of the ousted regimes, especially security agencies and the judiciary. Winning their support would allow Islamists to minimize the likelihood of the Algerian scenario.

Opponents claim that this faction is capable of limited and controlled use of political violence, the diffusion of which would give them a pretext in the future (provided they have the loyalty of the army and the internal troops) to declare a state of emergency and cut short the ostensible democratic transition.

This is certainly an adventurist scenario that eventually implies the monopolization of power, suppression of civil activists, and a general relapse into archaicism.

The last two factions agree on fundamental issues. Their disagreements are mostly tactical in nature. Moreover, some experts believe that our description of these factions is not based on reality, but is, in fact, an attempt to offer two alternative explanations of a single moderate Islamist strategy.

Indeed, both the proponents of the long game and supporters of *blitzkrieg* recognize the need to preserve and gradually reform the existing state institutions. Their attitude to

secular forces is almost the same, although *blitzkrieg* advocates are more active in their efforts to discredit them by conflating secularism and atheism in their rhetoric.

Hypothetically the greatest source of disagreement is their attitudes toward civil society and the creative class. For *blitzkrieg* supporters, these are hostile elements with alien, secular ideals and values, who pose a real threat to their plans to monopolize power.

On the other hand, proponents of the long game believe it is important to secure the support of these social groups not only for current purposes, but also in the longer term. And they urge serious engagement to gain their loyalty.

4. Salafi romantics. Unlike the three previous factions, which are rational and pragmatic in their political behavior, the Salafi romantics believe that the power they hold has been bestowed on them by God and their major task is to keep it and rapidly Islamize society and the state.

They don't seek compromise with other political forces, and the interests of the ummah obviously outweigh national interests for them. Many are willing to use violence to keep Islamists in power.

The Salafis are the internal loyal opposition, who can criticize the Islamists in power, while being prepared to defend them. They are urging leaders of Islamist parties to immediately introduce Sharia law and transform the political system. If need be, their activists can form party militias or fighting wings of Islamist parties.

5. *Jihadists*. The jihadists are similar to the previous groups in all respects except for their attitude to moderate Islamists, whom they consider traitors to the Islamic cause. Still, the differences between these two factions are relative, and according to some experts, they can adapt their political tactics as circumstances dictate.

In terms of numbers, the last two groups are clearly marginal. However, their willingness to use violence makes them a real threat to the public in the Middle East. This threat is compounded by the ongoing civil war in Syria, the spread of Libyan arms in North Africa, and conflicts in the countries of the Sahel.

Most of these factions within Islamist political parties are not institutionalized or even readily apparent. The division of Islamists along these fault lines may occur in the future, and it is not by far a cinch that it will be a full-scale dissociation. It is quite likely that various groups will form blocks within unified Islamist organizations (this can take the form of factions or group in the organization's leadership). And yet, this process is already under way, particularly in Tunisia and Egypt.

The situation in Libya and Yemen differs somewhat from other countries. In both cases, the religious identity of political parties and organizations is secondary to the tribal and regional divisions in society. As a result, as noted by Tunisian Islamists, the nominal liberals who came to power in Libya are pursuing even more religiously oriented policies than the Islamist Ennahda party.

On the other hand, in Yemen, even in the ranks of the most influential Islamist party, Al-Islah, there are those who hold similar beliefs as liberal Islamists (such as Nobel Prize winner Tawakkol Karman), as well as their more conservative opponents.

Both liberal Islamists and Salafi romantics are not very influential in Islamist leadership circles, which are dominated by proponents of the long game and *blitzkrieg*.

4. Political Islam and International Relations in the Middle East

How Will Islamists Change the Region?

The rise of political Islam in Arab and international politics continues to radically alter the alignment of forces in the region. Old relationships based on the temporary affinity of interests are giving way to new alliances characterized primarily by religious affiliation

> The transformation of Arab societies will continue to evolve and spread. There is cause to expect in the short term major upheavals in the Gulf monarchies

and the ambitious plans of regional and foreign players to use the volatile situation in the region to gain an edge in the fight for regional leadership and spheres of influence.

An alternative view is that the Arab Awakening has eliminated the foundations of regional solidarity, and now every state is openly guided only by its own political and economic interests. The newly empowered forces are mainly trying to determine who their enemies and allies are, based on the mood of the street, rather than developing evidence-based programs to address current challenges.

Middle East analysts unanimously agree that the transformation of Arab societies will continue to evolve and spread. Political parties and movements who want to effect fundamental democratic change in their countries need to make up for lost time and prepare for what is coming. There is cause to expect in the short term major upheavals in the Gulf monarchies. A considerable number of foreign-educated young Saudis are in no mood to support the kingdom's archaic status quo, which has held back the country's socio-political development. The generational change in leadership, in turn, may aggravate the confrontation between different clans and their patrons.

We believe the region has entered a protracted period of political chaos, economic decline and even existential threats to certain states. The danger of disintegration, terrorism and other manifestations of radical Islam has grown in a number of countries (Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Syria). And the new ruling elites have not yet consolidated power or demonstrated an ability to achieve the goals and ideals they proclaimed.

The political reorganization of Arab nations will continue to be an uneven, rocky process marked by occasional backtracking. The new authorities have to contend with enormous problems inherited from the old regimes and engendered by the revolutionary explosion

The region has entered a protracted period of political chaos, economic decline and existential threats to certain states

itself. Economics and politics are closely interwoven in this complex equation with many unknown variables.

Experts emphasize three key knots of problems that will ultimately determine the course of the transformation in the region, shifts in the regional balances, and the region's relations with the outside world, primarily the West and Russia.

The first one is how the situation in Egypt (still the key country despite losing some influence) and to some extent in Tunisia plays out. The second one is the outcome of the civil war in Syria, its consequences for neighboring Arab

countries, and its effect on the balance of power between key regional players, such as Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The third one is about progress (if any) in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, which is no longer a Middle East foreign policy priority, having been pushed into the background by the Arab Awakening, especially developments in Syria.

Egypt, Tunisia and other countries may ultimately follow an Islamic though essentially democratic path – this is precisely what the Muslim Brotherhood is trying to bring home to the people who put them in office, hoping to reassure the frightened liberals. The West is attempting to achieve the same in cooperation with international financial organizations. The degree of its influence will be one of the factors that determine whether Egypt and the rest of the region will travel down the path of modernization in the spirit of current realities. At the same time, the role of the West should not be exaggerated, despite its efforts to exploit Egypt's dependence on foreign financial aid (what is contributed by the Gulf states is clearly insufficient). Given the current alignment of forces in the region, Cairo has considerable latitude for political maneuvering.

For over 50 years, Egypt was an influential center of Middle East politics, despite its renunciation of pan-Arabism. The chaotic nature of its political transformation has undermined its influence Egypt has become more dependent on the Gulf States, which have gained clout in the Arab world not

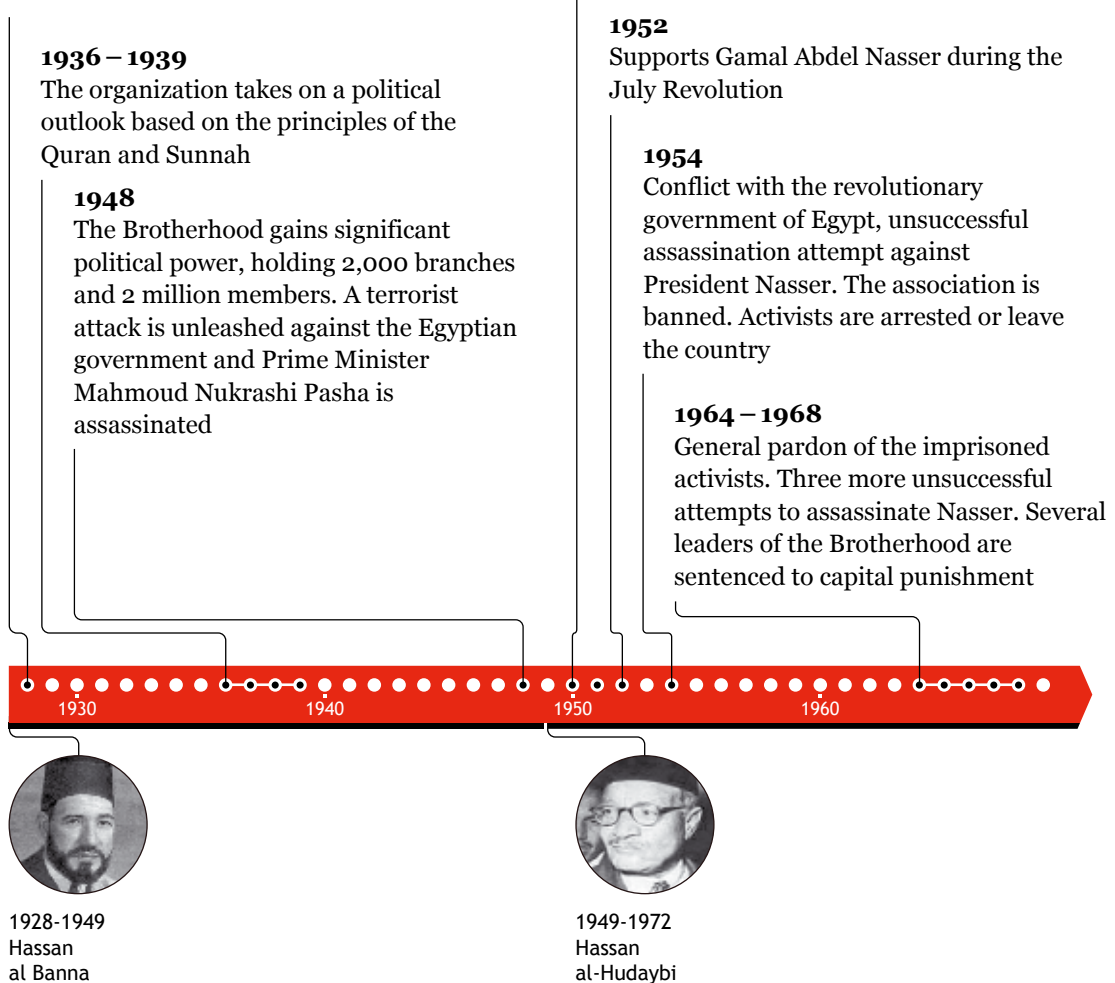# The role of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt's political system

Some facts:
- An international religious and political association

The Muslim Brotherhood in the world:
- Branches in over 70 countries
- 1930-1950s: their ideas spread outside Egypt; groups emerge in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Sudan and other Arab countries

- The Muslim Brotherhood is on Russia's list of extremist and terrorist organizations
- Motto: "Islam is the solution"

- 1960-1970s: the movement spreads to the United States and Europe. The movement is active in the Soviet Union, influences Central Asia
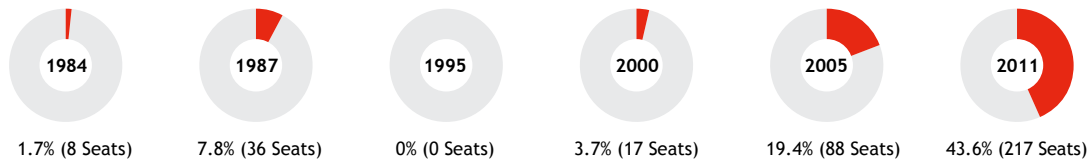- 1980s: the Palestinian Islamist Organization HAMAS is founded as a branch of the movement

1928
School teacher Hassan al Banna founds the association in Ismailia (Egypt). Education and charity work begins

1936 – 1939
The organization takes on a political outlook based on the principles of the Quran and Sunnah

1948
The Brotherhood gains significant political power, holding 2,000 branches and 2 million members. A terrorist attack is unleashed against the Egyptian government and Prime Minister Mahmoud Nukrashi Pasha is assassinated

1950 – 1951
The Brotherhood is legalized as a religious association. Hassan al-Hudaybi becomes the new leader

1952
Supports Gamal Abdel Nasser during the July Revolution

1954
Conflict with the revolutionary government of Egypt, unsuccessful assassination attempt against President Nasser. The association is banned. Activists are arrested or leave the country

1964 – 1968
General pardon of the imprisoned activists. Three more unsuccessful attempts to assassinate Nasser. Several leaders of the Brotherhood are sentenced to capital punishment

1930   1940   1950   1960

1928-1949
Hassan
al Banna

1949-1972
Hassan
al-Hudaybi

Seats in the People's Assembly, Egyptian Parliament's lower house

1984	1987	1995	2000	2005	2011
1.7% (8 Seats)	7.8% (36 Seats)	0% (0 Seats)	3.7% (17 Seats)	19.4% (88 Seats)	43.6% (217 Seats)

1970
Nasser dies, Anwar Sadat becomes president. The state's attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood relaxes. The Brotherhood's activity in Egypt intensifies

1979
The association condemns the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel and takes up a radical oppositional stance

1980s
Sadat is murdered by members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Brotherhood's spin-off terrorist group. Hosni Mubarak becomes president. The organization is still officially banned. The Brotherhood takes part in peaceful campaigns, cooperates with political parties, nominates its representatives as independent candidates in elections

1990s
Boycott of the parliamentary elections after the toughening of the election law

2000s
Success in the parliamentary elections: 88 seats in the People's Assembly in 2005. The Muslim Brotherhood becomes the largest oppositional parliamentary party. The Egyptian authorities intensify efforts to clamp down on the Brotherhood

2010
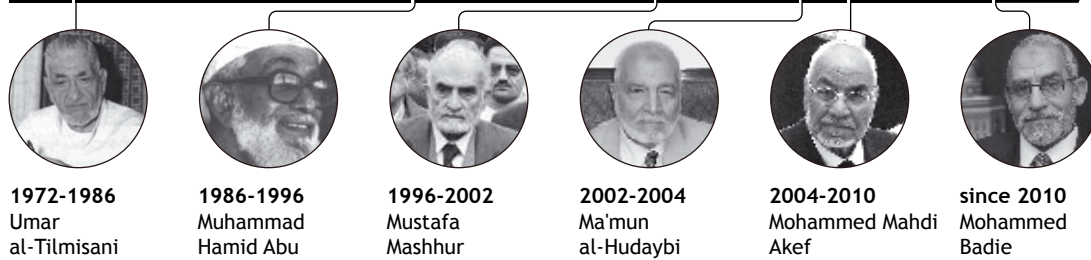Boycott of the parliamentary elections following mass fraud in the first round

2011
The association keeps a low profile during the revolution to avoid further repression and founds its own political party, the Freedom and Justice Party

2012
The Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohammed Morsi wins the presidential election. The Freedom and Justice Party takes over 40% of the seats in parliament

2013
The Muslim Brotherhood is officially registered as an association in Egypt. President Morsi is ousted

1970   1980   1990   2000   2010

1972-1986	1986-1996	1996-2002	2002-2004	2004-2010	since 2010
Umar al-Tilmisani	Muhammad Hamid Abu	Mustafa Mashhur	Ma'mun al-Hudaybi	Mohammed Mahdi Akef	Mohammed Badie

counting money from Islamic foundations, official financial assistance to Egypt from Qatar and Saudi Arabia has exceeded $10 billion, which obviously restricts Cairo's freedom in matters of foreign policy. This is unlikely to change in the short term.

Despite its internal upheavals, Egypt still plays an indispensable role as the first Arab country to conclude a peace treaty with Israel.

Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has not yet figured out how to build relations with Israel, but there are real reasons to believe that a cautious and pragmatic approach is winning out. The Egyptian authorities are backing up their official pledges and intentions to honor the peace treaty with coordinated actions and, in effect, tacit cooperation with Israel in suppressing terrorist activities on the Sinai Peninsula.

Egypt still plays an indispensable role as the first Arab country to conclude a peace treaty with Israel and an informal mediator in the arduous Palestinian-Israeli dialogue

Moreover, the Egyptian security services are containing the attempts by Palestinian extremists to use the security vacuum on Sinai to stage provocations. In turn, Israel is turning a blind eye to Egypt's violations of some of the treaty's provisions regarding its presence in Sinai's border areas.

It is also an informal mediator in the arduous Palestinian-Israeli dialogue, something that was reaffirmed during the exchange of air strikes between Gaza and Israel in October-November 2012, not long after Muhammad Morsi became president. Egypt also continues to act as an intermediary between the two major Palestinian movements, Hamas (which is close to the Muslim Brotherhood) and Fatah. As in the times of Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian intelligence community continues to supervise this dialogue.

Regime change in Egypt caused concern in the international community over the future of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and raised questions about the nature of Egypt's further relations with the Palestinians, and possible adjustments to its policies in the region. The

Cairo occasionally makes it clear that some of the treaty's provisions should be revised, namely, those that only allow Egypt to have a temporary and limited military presence in border areas for the purpose of conducting counter-terrorist operations. Egypt may also seek to revise gas contracts with Israel, as the anti-Israeli ultra conservatives in the Muslim Brotherhood insist. (Israeli analysts note the general rise in anti-Israeli sentiment in Egypt.)

Cairo has changed its tactic towards Hamas. Mubarak's tough line – sometimes close to the Israeli stance – has been replaced by a milder approach. It hopes to establish control over the most radical factions of Hamas and gradually push it in a direction that benefits Egypt's national interests. Qatar and to

a lesser extent Saudi Arabia are approaching Hamas in a similar way, using the desire of many of its leaders to break out of international isolation and shed the terrorist label. Much will depend on Israel itself; for now it is not only inflexible in this hazy time in the Arab world but actively narrowing the chances for a viable Palestinian state with its West Bank policy.

The outcome of the conflict will determine not only the nature of Syria's further political transformation but also the fate of its neighbors

The civil war in Syria is exerting an enormous influence on the region. As we see it, Jihadist Islamists are planning to take power with the help of military force. The outcome of this conflict, in which the interests of Gulf monarchies, Turkey and Iran clash, will determine not only the nature of Syria's further political transformation but also the fate of its neighbors.

Jihadist groups that adhere to the Al-Qaeda ideology, for instance, the Al-Nusra Front //*The Al-Nusra Front has openly acknowledged its affiliation with Al-Qaeda*//, which mostly consists of foreign volunteer fighters or mercenaries, make no attempt to conceal their resolve to create a "state based on Sharia that completely rejects all secular laws and democracy" after the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria. The next step is

to "establish a caliphate in the Levant" (Bilad al-Sham).

The hypothetical victory of the secular elements in the armed Syrian opposition could not put an end to the hostilities. The Al-Nusra Front and its allies would not lay down arms and will continue the war. If the Assad regime is overthrown, the disunited "victors" will then fight each other for power, and the Islamist forces would have a good chance of prevailing in this struggle. This outcome would inevitably weaken the cause of moderate political Islam in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and other Arab countries, and embolden Al-Qaeda affiliates in Yemen, Somalia, North Africa and the Sahel.

If the Jihadists win, ethnic and religious clashes are bound to surge in Syria, and rapidly spread to neighboring countries. Some experts believe that this scenario could lead to the partition or cantonization not only of Syria but also other countries, primarily Iraq and Lebanon.

Israel is concerned by the prospect of Syria's disintegration. Israeli leaders consider al-Assad to be the main source of problems. They do not fear the rise of Sunni radicals as long as the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis is broken. However, the potential collapse of the Syrian state cannot but cause Israeli apprehensions. There is a growing view that a radical regime can be contained if its country remains intact. Otherwise Israel will have a limited deterrence capability, and its nuclear arsenal could escalate tensions even further.

The growing confrontation between the military-political alliance of the Gulf states and Iran may become a factor in reformatting the region. Actually Syria is caught in the middle of this confrontation, which is increasingly sectarian in nature. The Gulf monarchies are supporting the burgeoning Sunni groups and even ultra-conservative Salafi groups in an attempt to oppose Iran with its nuclear ambitions and propensity to harness the groundswell of Islamism for its own interests. Apart from the fear of Iran and its military might, the anti-Iranian bias is the result of the political repercussions of the US invasion of Iraq and the subsequent withdrawal of coalition troops without

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If the Jihadists win, ethnic and religious clashes are bound to surge in Syria. This scenario could lead to the partition or cantonization of Syria, Iraq and Lebanon

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proper security guarantees. The change in the confessional balance of forces in Iraq in favor of the Shia majority has stoked fears in Saudi Arabia and especially Bahrain, where Shiites are the majority of the population.

Turkey clearly is playing a greater role in the new regional context. In fact, this has been true for the last few years, but the developments in Arab countries have given fresh impetus to its regional policy. Turkey's ruling party claims its motivations are moral – to support populations rebelling against authoritarian regimes. Some experts believe that by siding with the Arab street, Turkey now faces a difficult choice,

which is most pronounced in Libya and Syria. Ankara supported the NATO operation in Libya after it evacuated its own citizens. The logic of events has made Turkey and the West espouse similar or parallel interests with respect to Syria. Experts point out that when the events in Syria began to threaten Turkey directly (shelling of its border territories, refugees, etc.), its natural desire to bring the conflict to a rapid conclusion transformed into a desire to get rid of the Assad regime, hence its support for a no-fly zone and arming the opposition. At home the Government has been criticized for becoming part of the conflict rather than part of the solution. Turkey's position on Syria has highlighted its more active role in the region, which makes it possible to maintain a balance between different foreign policy vectors – NATO membership, regional ambitions and Turkish nationalism with Islamic features.

At the same time, Turkey plans to deepen ties with Egypt, whose leadership fully supports this idea. We believe the Egyptian leadership realizes that it is impossible and unnecessary to copy the Turkish model. Still, relations with Turkey are natural and desirable. Turkey will be a promising partner and doesn't raise the hackles of any political force in the country. Moreover, relations with Turkey counterbalance ties with Iran. It is common knowledge, the Egyptian bureaucracy is against relations with Iran, and, for all its pragmatism, the Muslim Brotherhood cannot see Iran as its partner for religious reasons either.

The West has also come to realize that the region is in for long-term destabilization if

the radicals prevail in the Islamist movement. As veteran US diplomat Henry Kissinger has warned, "Regime change, almost by definition, generates an imperative for nation-build-

The growing confrontation between the military-political alliance of the Gulf states and Iran may become a factor in reformatting the region

ing. Failing that, the international order itself begins to disintegrate. Blank spaces denoting lawlessness may come to dominate the map, as has already occurred in Yemen, Somalia, northern Mali, Libya and northwestern Pakistan, and may yet happen in Syria." //*The Washington Post, June 4, 2012*//

Given this turn of events, the international community's strategy of supporting moderate Islamists, who profess values that do not contradict the general democratic context, and bringing them into the democratic fold may fail. The rift between the West and the Islamic world would then begin to resemble a clash of civilizations.

In Russia, there is an essentially marginal view that in this scenario it will be able to promote the Islamic project as an alternative to the Western neo-liberal model. We believe the new Arab rulers have an interest in developing relations with Russia //*According to some representatives of Islamist parties, the new forces that have come to power must be open to the world and ready to develop partnership with the countries that did not pursue colonial policy (Russia, China and India). They should normalize relations with Iran and adequately meet the requirements of national minorities. Successes or failures in resolving these major tasks will determine the future of political Islam*// (in part, as a counterbalance to relations with the West) and we must be ready to respond in kind. However, by playing on the contradictions between Islamic and Western models of social organization, multi-religious Russia could create grave problems for itself at home.

Foreign Intervention: Protecting the Population or Overthrowing Regimes?

Foreign intervention is among the central problems of the last few decades, and it continues to be controversial. The Arab Awakening and the struggle of the (often armed) opposition against authoritarian regimes have made international intervention an imperative in the minds of some politicians. But this tool has become too politicized in the hands of those who are prepared to employ it. The framework of intervention has also broadened from aid to regimes or their opponents to full-scale military invasion.

The checks and balances system in the Middle East has taken shape over centuries. But foreign intervention in Iraq destroyed the long-established triangle of stability in the region based on the mutual deterrence of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. The war in Iraq freed Iran's hands and spurred its nuclear program.

The forms of foreign intervention and its effectiveness vary depending on the severity of the threat posed by a regime and the degree of consensus in the international community regarding the choice of response and its legitimization. The conceptual framework for foreign intervention aimed at de-escalating conflicts is found in such terms as preventive diplomacy, humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect.

The latter two concepts are relatively new, and there are still no clear criteria for determining whether the methods and aims employed by foreign powers really correspond to the principles behind these concepts, or reflect a selfish desire to steer events to their advantage. The emergence of new forms of intervention is the result of heightened international attention to state violence against civilians or ethnic and religious groups and new trends in how national sovereignty is interpreted.

The West has also come to realize that the region is in for long-term destabilization if the radicals prevail in the Islamist movement

"The time of absolute sovereignty has passed; its theory was never matched by reality," former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said. "It is the task of leaders of States today to understand this and to find a balance between the needs of good internal governance and the requirements of an ever more interdependent world." //*Boutros Ghali, An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping, New York, 1995*// While most experts acknowledge, at least in word, that this is a fair conclusion, they are deeply concerned that, in the era of globalization and greater supranational contacts, the complete renunciation of the idea of sovereignty may destroy practically all international norms and relations. It is also important to keep in mind the opposing trend: newly independent countries and post-revolutionary states in the Middle East tend to see sovereignty in absolute terms. These new regimes are largely guided by a nationalism

that rests on an Islamic rather than secular foundation.

The commonly accepted definition of sovereignty is the right of a state to complete self-government on a certain territory and a monopoly on decision-making. At the international level, this implies non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. To this day, there is no consensus on what human rights violations can justify a military intervention.

International law and norms provide for the protection of civilians during hostilities between states. In the event of an internal conflict and buildup of violence within one state, the restrictions imposed by sovereignty not only become an obstacle to observing these laws but also call for the drafting of new ones. The state is primarily responsible for protecting its own population and it has the necessary tools to do so. However, it can also pose a threat to its own citizens, for example, when it sacrifices the interests of certain individuals and groups for the sake of other groups or the majority. A struggle for control over government institutions poses an even bigger threat. Political violence has become essentially a permanent feature in some countries. If a state cannot or will not prevent an impending disaster, the principle of non-interference gives way to the principle of international protection of the population.

We believe it is both methodologically wrong and historically unlawful to set the concepts of sovereignty and human rights in opposition, but in some cases foreign intervention is absolutely necessary. However, there are well-grounded concerns that outside forces may intervene – even with the sanction of the UN or regional organizations – to achieve their own political ends. Chaotic changes to the rules can lead to an alternation of alliances and allies. For instance, in Mali external forces are fighting against the very people they supported in Libya. At the same time, a foreign intervention can pursue entirely practical objectives. Not accidentally, some believe that France introduced forces in Mali primarily because of its interest in uranium deposits in the north of that country.

Some analysts hold that view – which may be able to reconcile ardent opponents and supporters of foreign intervention – that interventions are not bad in and of themselves, but rather because: a) the existing legal framework to regulate them is inadequate; and b) only a few countries (or groups of countries) are capable of carrying them out. If

The foreign intervention in Iraq destroyed the long-established triangle of stability in the region based on the mutual deterrence of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. The war in Iraq freed Iran's hands and spurred its nuclear program

everything is determined by ends and nobody cares about the means, parties of international relations are eroded and rules become vague. The means of intervention employed today are ultimately aimed at achieving abstract and vague goals and ideals, such as dissemination of democracy in societies that do not share liberal values.

It is common knowledge that President Barack Obama has shifted the focus of outside interventions from military power to soft power, which is certainly a positive step. However, the notion that democracy should be promoted in different societies remains an extremely ideology-driven instrument of influence.

According to international law, an intervention does not have to be a last resort, after all other options have been exhausted, in order to be

legitimate. There is a temptation to opt for simpler and faster solutions instead of the long and ineffective search for political solutions, which in principle has rehabilitated the use of military force in modern international relations. Also, in situations with heavy loss of life and the possibility of even greater violence, sometimes an immediate response is required in order to prevent the worst-case scenario. A key consideration in this event is how great the threat to international security is. The brutal massacre in Rwanda did not prompt foreign intervention, which some analysts attributed to double standards.

One can identify three models of intervention motivated (formally) by the goal of effecting change in a country.

1. Restoring statehood and governance: introducing international coalition troops into a failed state that has become a gray zone and a source of global and regional threats (Afghanistan).

2. Invading a country ruled by a dictatorial regime and lacking a powerful domestic resistance movement bent on overthrowing the regime and leading a transition to a more liberal model of governance; pretext: the regime poses a potential threat to peace and security (Iraq).

3. Support for an opposition movement or military protection from the regime (Libya), as well as financial and military aid to the opposition, stopping short of direct military intervention (Syria); in this case pressure is exerted on the regime with a view to replacing it.

Relative to the latter two cases, the actions of the coalition in Afghanistan met with little criticism despite civilian losses. Experts point to several reasons for this: the collapse of the state in Afghanistan and the absence of forces in the country capable of finding compromise

It is both methodologically wrong and historically unlawful to set the concepts of sovereignty and human rights in opposition, but in some cases foreign intervention is absolutely necessary

independently and starting the process of rebuilding the country after years of civil war; fragmentation of the participants in the political process; the archaic nature of Afghan society; and the inability to counter criminals and terrorists. Foreign intervention was necessary to neutralize the threats emanating from Afghanistan and set the country on the path to normal development. Critically, coalition forces were introduced into Afghanistan not only for the sake of transforming it but also to counter international terrorists who could operate with impunity it a country without a normally functioning government. Afghanistan was perceived as the frontline in the fight against terrorism, a threat that had acquired global proportions. This drew attention away from some of the coalition's miscalculations and setbacks.

The situation in Iraq was different. The regime of Saddam Hussein used harsh methods to ensure the country's territorial integ-

rity. No totalitarian terrorist organization dared challenge his authority. The lack of a persuasive justification for the invasion explained the lack of consolidated international support. The primary objective was to overthrow the regime, not to counter a global threat. Outlawing the Ba'ath Party, disbanding the army and transitioning to a government model that drew power from the Shiite majority rather than Sunni minority have delayed stabilization for many years. Iraq, still suffering from serious systemic challenges, is an example of a failed intervention.

Military intervention in a country with an active civic confrontation and growing civilian causalities is even more complicated. The ruling regime is to blame for creating the situation, and totalitarian or strongly authoritarian regimes are usually incapable of internal transformation. Radical political reforms are seen as a concession to the modern educated and relatively westernized segment of society, which cannot and will not prop up the regime.

Authoritarian leaders are becoming hostages to a policy that leads to destabilization, as modern opposition forces are followed by the traditionalist masses that – in light of foreign support – can only be stopped by direct and massive violence. This formula is not universal. There are examples of relatively peaceful transitions in countries with developed political institutions, where rulers do not cling to power against all odds. Egypt and Tunisia are both transitioning independently, although

clashes continue and there is growing polarization between moderate and radical Islamists.

Foreign intervention can be justified when the number of victims sacrificed on the altar of maintaining the old order exceeds all proportion and no transition can take place for lack of effective agents. In this context, there still a need to specify evaluations and approaches to the events in Libya. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the Libyan regime was prepared to destroy the opposition, which necessitated intervention. On the other hand, the vague provisions of UN Security Council Resolution

victim of militia anarchy and internal threats to security.

However, even if there are huge losses and fierce clashes that cannot be stopped without direct foreign intervention, this does not mean that this intervention is possible. Using special forces to enforce peace means taking sides, which in a civil conflict will always be perceived as a politically motivated move. In Libya, NATO forces were actually fighting on the side of the opposition and the result of the Libyan operation in certain measure discredited the very idea of intervention.

> President Obama has shifted the focus of outside interventions from military power to soft power, but the notion that democracy should be promoted in different societies remains an extremely ideology-driven instrument of influence

Support for the regime or the opposition amid a civil confrontation also qualifies as intervention, with Syria being the most controversial case in point. Both the Assad regime and the opposition are supported by global and regional forces. The United States and other Western countries, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are all actively pursuing their own

1973 and the discrepancy between the goals of the intervening forces and the objectives set forth in the resolution resulted in actions that were incompatible with the UN Security Council mandate to stabilize Libya. The attempts to curb the regime's use of violence against its own people led to the extrajudicial execution of Muammar Gaddafi.

The main challenge for Libya is the restoration or formation of government institutions that are either still weak or did not exist under the Gaddafi regime. Libya is still a

course. Israel is periodically bombing Syria. Non-state actors capable of large-scale and far-reaching actions are playing an increasing role. These are organizations, political parties and foreign fighters from other countries in the region that are attempting to influence events in Syria. It appears the world is entering a new stage, in which various groups are becoming the key players and the interaction of external forces is becoming less and less organized. Syria is an example of a bloody and fierce war that has reached a kind of dynamic equilibrium because of continuous outside support for both sides.

Neither side has managed to tip the scales in its favor. Losses have run into tens of thousands (but let's not forget that up to 200,000 people were killed during the 10-year occupation of Iraq) and the country is in ruins. However, we believe that foreign intervention would not stop the slaughter even technically. The Syrian

Today rebel units, which include many mercenaries and foreign volunteers, are committing human rights violations on the same or larger scale than the regime. Both sides will fight till the end. They are well armed and committed. Each side has its patrons and sympathizers outside of the country.

Even if there are huge losses and fierce clashes that cannot be stopped without direct foreign intervention, this does not mean that this intervention is possible

A solution may be found if an agreement is reached at the global level (between Russia and the United States), provided there is close coordination with the regional players that are directly influencing events.

case has revealed the serious limitations on humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect. First, UN Security Council members support opposite sides of the conflict and have different views on military intervention. Second, given the fierce nature of the conflict in Syria, no forces introduced into the country would be able to gain a foothold. They

The room for maneuver should be sought right now because the international community has been treading water on Syria. There is a proposal to establish an international committee on Syria with the participation of major global and regional actors that would work out a common position on Syria and determine the steps needed to settle the conflict.

The Syrian case has revealed the serious limitations on humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect

The process of political decision-making that could lead to a military intervention is not fully in line with the current complex situation. The media are playing a huge role in shaping public opinion and political decisions on the basis of a virtual picture

would come under attack and would be unable to impose a ceasefire. The crisis in Syria began with peaceful demonstrations against the regime that were brutally suppressed. With time the opposition became more radicalized and launched an armed resistance.

that may be far removed from reality. In all cases, greater bilateral and multilateral contacts with regimes and opposition forces, fact-finding missions and international NGOs should become important tools for verifying information coming from zones of conflict.

The international community should try to observe the established rules more carefully so as not to finally destroy the fragile and irreplaceable balance of forces in regions

It is important to assess the outcomes of previous cases of foreign intervention. The results have often been dubious, and the mistakes made will remain on the conscience of those responsible for the invasion. Needless to say, they are not the only culprits – part of the blame rests with the internal forces they counted on but which proved unable to handle greater political responsibility. It may be useful to revive the practice of issuing White Books on the reasons for an intervention's successes and failures.

Foreign intervention will always rouse many negative emotions. But wherever there are conflicts it will always be an accompanying factor of influence, promising to either help put an end to them or fuel them. As for the international community, it should try to observe the established rules more carefully so as not to finally destroy the fragile and irreplaceable balance of forces in regions and within individual states.

5. The "New" Middle East: Political Islam and Russia's Interests

Russia's fundamental interests in the Middle East seemed stable and immutable for a long time. Traditionally, Russia had a stake in establishing friendly relations with all countries in the region, fostering trade and expanding markets for its military and civilian products, coordinating efforts in the

> **The Russian Federation is a multiethnic and multi-confessional country with a significant Muslim population. There is no hostility between Christianity and Islam in Russia**

energy sphere, preventing anti-Russian alliances from being formed, countering extremism and terrorism, and so on. Basically these interests remain valid to this day, but the context, in which Russia acts to promote its interests in the Middle East, has become significantly more complex and calls for new approaches.

The situation began to change following the Arab Awakening, which revealed deeper, more organic bonds in the context of regional and global relations. The rise and consolidation of political Islam in the Arab world, the election of Islamists following popular revolutions, and the prospect of greater Islamist influence on political processes have become common features of the Middle East today and are likely to remain so in the future.

The Russian Federation is a multiethnic and multi-confessional country with a significant Muslim population. It positions itself and is perceived as part of the Islamic world (consider its observer status in the OIC), and borders on Muslim countries. Therefore, the changes underway in the Middle East will significantly increase the importance of this region in Russia's foreign policy.

The majority of Muslims in Russia are Sunnis in the Hanafi tradition, which can coexist

with Orthodox Christianity. In general, there is no hostility between Christianity and Islam in Russia. There is no aggressive atheism in Russia either, and in terms of values Russian Orthodoxy is close to Islam. Muslims play an important role in the country, even without having their own political parties.

Events in the Middle East have suddenly acquired an internal political dimension for Russia, which has become a field for the complex interplay of secular and religious forces, including moderates and radicals within Islam

Russia has experience working with neighboring Muslim states, has long-standing ties in the Arab world and no history of colonialism there. Russia is the legal successor of the Soviet Union, which was a strong supporter of Arab national liberation movements.

Throughout the 1990s, Russia maintained and promoted relations with countries in the region, but due to its limited resources at the time it could not and did not seek to meaningfully strengthen its positions in the Middle East. Russia's policy mostly focused on promoting business interests, continuing the country's involvement in the Middle East peace process, and maintaining some degree of relations with all regional players at a purely non-ideological level. As a result, Russia's Middle East policy was increasingly routine in nature. Unexpectedly, the Arab world awoke

and a really new and unfamiliar Middle East emerged from the Awakening.

The main element of novelty is that events in the Middle East have suddenly acquired an internal political dimension for Russia. Today, the challenges emanating from the region are having an impact on Russia's domestic policy, which makes the current situation significantly different from the past, when Moscow could afford to formulate its interest in the most general form.

Actually, Russia has become a field for the complex interplay of secular and religious forces, including moderates and radicals within Islam. Russia and the countries to its south, which are critically important to Moscow, have found themselves squeezed between an Arab world in the grips of revolutionary transformations and Afghanistan, which may see the resurgence of radical Islam following the withdrawal of foreign troops.

These trends are creating a new and more favorable environment for advocates of political Islam in Russia, who can now count on broad support and assistance from foreign partners, including various non-state actors (foundations, organizations, etc.).

The extent of a country's exposure to foreign influences is always determined by the severity of its internal problems, and Russia is no exception. Historically, Russia has been home to various ethnic groups with different

religious beliefs, traditions, degrees of modernization, and political and social involvement in the life of their state.

It is well known that socio-cultural differences can be quite significant even within the same ethnic group. The populations of large cities in Russia are very different from residents of small, often depopulated villages and towns that are cut off from modern culture and the modern economy.

The events in the Middle East are closely linked to attempts by some Western states to impose, directly or indirectly, an alien neo-liberal agenda on countries in the region

In a number of Russia's Muslim regions, this socio-cultural rift is very pronounced and characterized by clan-based politics, archaic elements, a lack of social justice, biased law enforcement, utterly unfair wealth accumulation, unemployment, and systemic corruption.

Faced with the discrepancy between proclaimed, constitutionally guaranteed principles and the actual situation on the ground, people turn to radicals who offer clear and simple solutions. The success of the radical sermon in Russia will also depends on how events in the Arab world and Afghanistan unfold.

The current threat of destabilization emanating from the Middle East is not limited to the

Islamist factor alone. Foreign interference is perceived as an even greater security risk for Russia. Many Russian and some foreign experts believe that the recent events in the region are closely linked to attempts by some Western states to impose, directly or indirectly, an alien neo-liberal agenda on countries in the region.

Since liberal ideas are alien and incomprehensible to the traditional segment of the population, foreign interference can only result in the ousting of legitimate governments and their replacement by politically inexperienced opposition leaders who are unprepared to assume responsibility for their country. According to experts, the consequences could be even more disastrous in the event of a military intervention to support the opposition. This could further intensify interfaith and ethnic contradictions and result in the disintegration of statehood. Under this scenario, the West will find itself acting in tandem with Islamic radicals and could be perceived (in its approaches to the Syrian conflict, for example) as wittingly or unwittingly abetting the victory of the extremists.

The segment of the Russian political elite that distrusts the West, rightfully or not, has a problematic interpretation of differences in political systems, viewing them as a source of existential conflict. In this context, the events in the Arab world are explained as Western schemes (along the lines of standard conspiracy theories) and political tactics that can be potentially used in Russia (e.g. fears that

the West will foment an "orange revolution" in Russia or something worse). Shifting the focus from domestic political actors that have been the main drivers of the Arab revolutions to foreign players greatly distorts the reality.

The Syrian conflict has been a major challenge for Russian foreign policy. Unlike the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, where the role of foreign interference could be disputed despite the rise of anti-American sentiment (particularly

Russia's stance on Syria wants to demonstrate to the West and a number of regional actors that its position and approaches to international issues must be taken into account

during the recent election campaigns in Russia and the United States), there is no doubt about the extent of foreign involvement in Syria. While Bashar al-Assad can hardly be called an ally of Russia, Moscow has supported the legitimate Syrian government against attempts to overthrow it by the Syrian opposition, which consists of an extremely motley group of political forces that is held together by foreign support. The opposition forces insist on al-Assad's resignation as a precondition for any negotiations. Russia's firm and principled position, calling for a political solution without preconditions, has not always been met with understanding in the Arab world and the UN Security Council.

Russia's policy to uphold international law has been often interpreted as an egoistic desire to

keep Bashar al-Assad in power at any cost. This is not to deny that Russia's stance on Syria has also been motivated by instrumental considerations. Moscow wants to demonstrate to the West and a number of regional actors that its position and approaches to international issues must be taken into account.

The same reasoning was behind Russia's decision to supply Syria with S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems under previously signed contracts, and its plan to revive the Mediterranean squadron, which, according to experts, is directly linked with the situation in Syria. The search for additional leverage is always justified, but it is important to ensure that Russia is not perceived as being directly involved in the conflict (which, however, has been the case with other players).

In reality, the conflict in Syria can not only divide Russia and other global and regional players but also be a source of opportunities for rapprochement and constructive dialogue. The US-Russian agreement to convene a conference on Syria has created a new mechanism for interaction between global and regional players, despite persisting differences.

The desire to find a compromise solution has been gaining momentum. No one wants more bloodshed in Syria or for radicals to gain power, which would have disastrous consequences for the country and the region. And yet, the US decision to arm the Syrian rebels, and the EU's de-facto lifting of the embargo on arms supplies to Syrian rebels (notwithstanding

certain restrictions) ahead of the forthcoming conference on Syria, the training of militants by Western instructors at specialized camps has paved the way for continued bloodshed, the wholesale destruction of the country, and an escalation of the conflict.

Russian Muslims could act as a bridge between Russia and the Arab world

The spontaneous nature of the Arab Awakening and the fact that many political parties were unprepared to take part in it, including by offering an attractive social and economic program, predetermined the victory of the Islamists, who had effective and disciplined political organizations, information outlets and sufficient financial resources at their dis-

The struggle between moderates and radicals will determine the future of Middle Eastern countries

posal. And since this process is far from over, the political parties and movements interested in leading a profound democratic transformation of their countries need to make up for lost time and prepare for the upcoming events.

What's clear, however, is that the forces that have emerged in the forefront of the political process have to prove that they can be agents of change, that they understand their historic

responsibility, and that they are prepared to assume the burden of tackling unresolved problems. The more progress they make on this path, the more interested Russia will become in establishing and expanding ties with moderate Islamists. For Russia, as a country with a multicultural heritage, being ready to promote relations with the new governments in the interests of fostering dialogue between civilizations is one of its fundamental values.

Russian Muslims could act as a bridge between Russia and the Arab world. In this regard, it is particularly important to restore educational ties, including opportunities for Russia's Muslims to study in Arab countries and for Arab students to study in Russia. Thousands of Arab students were educated in the Soviet Union and many of them have Russian wives, but Moscow has failed to use this informal resource of influence.

Russia rightly criticizes extremists in the region, but it also needs to practice a differentiated approach to Islamist organizations. There are Islamist groups and parties whose agendas are essentially local. They pursue national goals and have no interest in expanding their activities beyond their borders in order to support Islamist groups with dubious goals and reputations. One such localized group is Hamas, which quickly grew disillusioned with the actions of the mujahedeen in Afghanistan after concluding that they were controlled by the US and Saudi Arabia and pursued goals that had little in common with the cause

of jihad. Hamas has never backed Islamic separatists in Russia due to the fact that their struggle also has little to do with Islamic ideals and that Moscow has always been supportive of the Palestinian cause. Russia has also worked to reconcile Hamas and Fatah, and there is hope that they will finally form a single government.

The experience of Arab countries with religious extremism could be very useful for Russia and its allies. Islamist regimes and parties need to foster mutual understanding and cooperation with Russia

This does not mean that Moscow has to unconditionally support all of Hamas's actions, but we believe that Russia should accentuate the differences between this movement and the more radical and irresponsible Palestinian Islamist groups like Islamic Jihad or terrorist groups linked to al-Qaeda.

Russia must do more to improve its image in the Arab-Muslim world and to explain its foreign policy goals and actions

President Vladimir Putin's negotiations with his Egyptian counterpart Muhammad Morsi in Durban, South Africa, followed by the Egyptian President's official visit to Moscow,

signaled Russian willingness to build relations with the new Islamist-led governments. This process has been welcomed by the overwhelming majority of foreign members of the Middle East Dialogue.

Both Russia and Islamic parties must understand each other better to carry out their common tasks of countering extremism and terrorism with a view to securing stable development. Politicians and experts agree that the struggle between moderates and radicals will largely determine the future of Middle Eastern countries //*Some experts, however, disagree with this position. The most hardline secularists question the need for cooperation with the Islamists in the Middle East. The Islamists, they claim, disparage the very idea of a secular state, seek to establish a theocracy, and disregard universal human rights. At the same time, representatives of the al Nour Party emphasize their opposition to any kind of dictatorship and their support for generally recognized rights*//.

The experience of Arab countries with religious extremism could be very useful for Russia and its allies. It can also draw important lessons from how religious and secular forces interact in the region. Russia has always been and will remain a secular state. It simply could not exist as a single state in a different format. But in a multi-faith society this interaction has dynamism of its own, something that calls for

new approaches better suited to new international and national realities.

Arab analysts believe that Islamist regimes and parties need to foster mutual understanding and cooperation with Russia and to establish a dialogue with its public and political circles. Due to possible existence of bias in Russia regarding the role and place of Islam in society and politics, the focus should be on explaining the agendas of the new Islamist governments, their domestic and foreign policy goals, their attitudes toward religious and ethnic minorities, and the place of women in Muslim society.

Russia also must do more to improve its image in the Arab-Muslim world and to explain its foreign policy goals and actions so that they are not interpreted as hostile to the interests of the new Islamist governments and political forces in the Arab East. At the same time, Russian policy should be nuanced and carefully considered, as the Muslim world is obviously not a single whole. It encompasses groups of countries with conflicting religious and political interests. Apart from the official level, reputational actions, as we see it, should take the form of scientific, cultural, public, women's, youth and sporting exchanges, contacts between NGOs, as well as joint cultural, sports and student festivals. This will make it possible for representatives of different cultures and traditions to overcome mutual distrust and bias and foster a better mutual understanding.

6. Afterword

As this paper was being prepared for publication, Egypt entered a new phase of its transformation. Following a new wave of protests, this time directed against the President and Islamists, the military removed President Morsi from office, dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution, and formed an interim government to run the country until new elections are held. While unexpected, these events have confirmed some of the conclusion made in this paper.

First, the Arab Awakening promises to be a long and painful process, during which the countries in the region might experience more change and turmoil.

Second, street protests in the Arab world have become a serious political actor that can trigger systemic changes in state system.

Third, the military, at least in Egypt, remains one of the most influential forces not inferior even to such a powerful player as the Muslim Brotherhood, which secured the support of nearly half the nation's electorate.

Fourth, Egyptian society, just as in Syria and many other countries in the region, is divided, and this fragmentation will be difficult to overcome. So far, there are no clear winners or losers, but the new authorities will be just as hardpressed as the Muslim Brotherhood to address the challenging social and economic problems facing the country.

It is noteworthy that the United States, which enthusiastically embraced the downfall of Mubarak's regime and threw its weight behind the moderate Islamists who proclaimed a commitment to democracy, basically backed the military coup that ousted Egypt's democratically elected president.

The Egyptian Interior Minister's decision to shut down religious TV channels is hardly in keeping with the democratic ideals of the West. The Saudi King supported the military coup two hours after General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced that President Morsi had been deposed and sent a congratulatory message to the new President Adly Mansour immediately after his appointment. Other Gulf States have also welcomed the coup (with the exception of Qatar, which has been supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood).

The fact that Turkey condemned the coup suggests that tensions are building up between Saudi Arabia and Turkey, the two most influential regional players, which have been almost unanimous in their support of the Syrian opposition. According to some analysts, the Turkish government was demoralized by the coup in Egypt //*Bruce Riedel, "Saudi Arabia Cheers the Coup in Egypt," The Daily Beast, July 7, 2013*//, which will inevitably have a serious impact on Ankara's policy towards Syria.

Some experts even claimed that the social and political model pursued by Prime Minister Erdogan's Justice and Development Party was facing a serious crisis, as demonstrated by the ongoing protests in Istanbul and other major Turkish cities. The downfall of the Muslim Brotherhood has also scared the leaders of Hamas, who increasingly had been taking cues from the Islamist government in Cairo.

We believe that the unfolding situation in the Middle East is likely to make political Islam an even more important factor in regional and world politics.